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BROADCAST NEWS

WASHINGTON - An "insolent approach" and "undignified assaults" by TV and radio reporters are hurting chances of getting relief from government regulation of election and political issues broadcasts, a member of the Federal Communications Commission said on Tuesday.

Commissioner James H. Quello, in an interview repeated a warning he gave to an industry group on Monday that attempts to get rid of federal rules requiring broadcasters to be fair when they discuss important controversial issues and give equal time when they put candidates on the air, may be doomed until Congress thinks broadcasters have earned full freedom.

In his speech to a conference on The Business of TV News, Quello was critical of "the insolent approach to the president by some nationally known reporters at press conferences...."

In the interview, Quello was particularly critical of a question asked by Sam Donaldson of ABC News at the end of a presidential news conference on Dec. 9. "Are you and your son, Michael, closer to resolving your differences?" Donaldson asked after formal questioning had ended, referring to a much-reported family feud.

"Sam, I think yesterday Nancy gave you a perfect answer? Merry Christmas," Reagan replied.

Quello said President Reagan has been seen by the public as "reacting graciously to undignified assaults" when he answers such questions.

"The adversary mentality of the press is reaching serious proportions and... this may have serious adverse consequences for the press - particularly the broadcast press," Quello, a former newscaster said.

ABC News Washington bureau chief George Watson said Donaldson "does his job when he asks tough questions," but conceded that all reporters, Donaldson included ask questions that might be "better phrased" or were "better left unsaid."

"We believe Sam is eminently fair to whomever he is covering and that includes Democratic and Republican presidents," Watson said.

In his speech, Quello complained, "Television has trivialized officials and institutions which are important to the fabric of our society, it has performed a public disservice and it caters to those who would retain and even tighten the straightjacket on electronic journalism."

Quello has often testified before Congress and said at FCC meetings that he favors repeal and said "Perhaps there is a message we should all

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heed when Congress, the elected representatives of the people, so adamantly refuses to repeal the restrictive fairness doctrine and Section 315. The First Amendment notwithstanding, Congress may be insisting that the electronic press gain full freedom the old-fashioned way - they may have to earn it," he concluded.

Lou Adler, president of the Radio Television News Directors Association, called Quello's choice of words, "cute" but "unfortunate."

"I don't think it is a proper statement to make given the history of this country." he said.

"If we have to earn our freedom under the First Amendment, that is unfortunate," Adler said in a telephone interview from New York where he is vice president and news director of WOR Radio. "I don't believe Congress is telling us that," he said. "I think it is a cute line, but I think it is misplaced."

He said he thought the Commission should repeal the fairness doctrine without waiting for Congressional action.

Quello said his advisors don't think the FCC has the authority to drop the doctrine, although the commission created it. Congress later embraced the doctrine as law.

Adler agreed with Quello, "We are arrogant too often. We are rude too much of the time." ✓

"We have very poor public relations and we have to do something about it," he said. ✓

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